

The Alabama Forestry Commission and Illegal Dumping

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Why would the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) be interested in illegal dumping? The answer is because it has a responsibility in preventing wildfires.

The Forestry Commission is responsible for suppressing wildfires on approximately 22 million acres. Suppression is dangerous and expensive. There is expense in paying for the suppression as well as the damage caused by the fire. The solution is to prevent or mitigate as many wildfires as possible. One technique of mitigation is accomplished through prescribed burning which reduces the damage caused by an unexpected wildfire. Another technique is prevention by reducing or eliminating illegal dumps.

Illegal dumping appears to be an Olympic sport in some areas of the state. Both sociological factors and lack of landfills have an impact upon the location and frequency of this undesirable activity. The most common items associated with dumps are washing machines, clothes dryers, water heaters, construc-

tion material, and household garbage most frequently containing beer bottles and baby diapers. A typical location is a creek or drain leading into a waterway.

Regardless of the reasons, illegal dumps contribute to pollution, become an eyesore, and are a source of wildfires. It is common for a dump to grow in size and then be burned to reduce the quantity of debris. Burning also destroys evidence associated with those who dump.

For every fire that is prevented, there is one less fire to be suppressed. For each dump eliminated, there is one less likely source of ignition. Therefore, AFC investigators attempt to identify those who dump and prosecute them. Illegal dumping, a misdemeanor, must usually be seen by an officer in order to make an arrest. However, the legislature recently passed a bill that allows for a presumption of guilt with a chance for rebuttal. According to 13a-7-29 of the Code of Alabama, if a name appears on documents in the dump, then that person is presumed guilty unless they can justify their innocence. It is possible that the guilty party only deposited a small amount of debris

or litter within a larger pile of debris. Without adequate rebuttal, the person can be charged by an officer and must appear before a judge to answer for the entire dump.

Some officers have access to video equipment that can be used to monitor dump sites. This system has some limitations but has been successful in several prosecutions. This type of monitoring has also revealed other illegal activity.

Sentencing for a class C misdemeanor is limited to \$500 and/or three months in jail. Some judges modify the fine and require the guilty party to clean up the dump. This can become rather expensive if the dump is large.

Through a program offered by the Alabama Forestry Association, witnesses may be rewarded up to \$5,000 for information related to a forestry crime.

When illegal dumping is defeated, we all win. Do your part to help protect the environment, enhance our view of nature, and reduce wildfires. It is all possible with one prevented or eliminated dump. ♣

Land Stewardship at Its Finest

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access throughout the property. Two 10-foot by 8-foot concrete fords were used as were two steel Bailey bridges.

In 1984, a two-acre pond site was cleared and soil samples were taken to determine clay content and soil acidity by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The proper amount of lime was applied to neutralize the pH, and the pond was stocked with bream and bass purchased from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. White amur were also added to the pond to control aquatic weeds. The pond is fertilized every six weeks during the summer to increase fish production, and smaller bream and bass are removed from the pond to keep the fish population in balance. A Department of Conservation and Natural Resources fisheries biologist seines the pond every five years to deter-

mine how many pounds of fish should be harvested from the pond and inspects the pond periodically to determine aquatic weed species and control. Two herbicide applications have been applied to the pond to control aquatic plant species.

After Salem purchased the property, he applied herbicides to a two-acre kudzu patch. Herbicide applications have been applied several times to stop the spread of this invasive species. Cogongrass is also established in several areas and was sprayed recently with varying herbicide concentrations to determine which rate was most effective. Annual monitoring and herbicide applications will ensure that invasive species are controlled.

Since 1990, Dr. Saloom has been working with a registered forester who has recommended, marked, and overseen timber harvests through their completion.

Three separate timber harvests were performed with wildlife management and water quality control as integral considerations in the process. The income derived from the timber harvests was reinvested into the property for further improvements.

Working with forestry consultants, wildlife and fisheries biologists, and other natural resource professionals, Dr. Salem Saloom has managed to derive income from timber production and create excellent wildlife habitat through good forest stewardship. He has utilized services offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Alabama Forestry Commission to establish a long-term plan for his property and obtain cost share assistance for various management activities. ♣